

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Wildlife Services (WS) program is unique among APHIS programs, in that a high percentage of some employees' daily duties involve hazardous procedures and materials. To complete the Program's mission, employees use motorized land vehicles (ATVs, snowmobiles, trucks and automobiles), watercraft, aircraft, hazardous chemicals (laboratory, manufacturing), pesticides, immobilization and euthanasia drugs, explosives (including pyrotechnics), animal handling, and firearms. Recognizing the risk involved in these operations, WS has in place extensive safety policies and procedures to ensure the safety of WS employees. Accidents during the last five years involving aircraft, firearms, pyrotechnics, and water safety highlighted the need for WS to reassess safety policy and procedures to ensure the work environment is as safe as possible for WS employees.

This safety review was not designed to assess the appropriateness or effectiveness of WS mission activities. It was designed and conducted for one purpose: to ensure WS is doing everything that can be reasonably expected, to provide the safest working environment for its employees.

## **2. PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE REVIEW**

Aviation, firearms, pyrotechnics and water safety accidents in 2006 and 2007 highlight the need for WS to take a critical look at its safety policy and procedures. In June 2007, working cooperatively with the APHIS Administrator's office, the WS Deputy Administrator began a comprehensive review of nine WS programmatic areas that present a significant safety risk.

Nine major program areas of the WS program were included in this safety review: aviation, explosives and pyrotechnics, firearms, hazardous materials (chemical and biological), immobilization and euthanasia drugs, pesticides, vehicles, watercraft, and wildlife diseases/parasites (zoonotic disease). To facilitate the program-wide review process, one WS employee was identified as the facilitator and primary contact for each area. The facilitator was responsible for assuming the lead role in the initial design of his or her component review, securing contracts or cooperative agreements with the reviewing organization, and ensuring the final report was complete with findings and recommendations. Since this was a voluntary review, no punitive actions were associated with the review process. This approach allowed all WS programs and employees freedom to be transparent and open when contacted by reviewers.

The actual program area reviews were conducted by independent subject-area experts to ensure objectivity. It was also determined that organizations familiar with the WS mission would increase the quality of the review, however, this was not a critical condition of contractor selection. Subject area experts selected to conduct the reviews included the following organizations: